

Wheaton's Public Safety Audit

A report presented to

County Executive Douglas M. Duncan

by the

Wheaton Public Safety Audit Task Force

October 2004



Note: All crime statistics used in this report are taken from Montgomery County Police Department data and, for comparative purposes, are based solely on verified crime (these determined by police to have actually occurred). Actual police activity in an area is indicated by the number of calls for service, which includes those incidents that have been cleared as unfounded.

These statistics were gathered using reported events and may not conform to Uniform Crime Reporting standards.



I. Background and Purpose

The Wheaton Redevelopment Program (“WRP”) was established by County Executive Douglas M. Duncan in 2000. It has had great success in spurring private reinvestment in the downtown at a relatively modest investment by the public sector. Thus far, Redevelopment efforts have resulted in private investment of \$350 million leveraged by a public investment of \$11 million.

The goal of the WRP, with the support of the residential and business communities, is to create an eclectic, diverse 24/7 downtown which retains a

small-town feeling. Much work has been done by staff, businesspeople and residents to encourage development, retain existing retail, enhance public and private infrastructure and ensure a clean and safe downtown. The County established Clean and Safe Teams in 2001. Their efforts have been an enormous success; however, many people believed that a comprehensive examination of public safety needs and resources was necessary. Therefore, this Public Safety Audit process was started.

In November 2003, a group of stakeholders was created representing business, residential, development and government. The group met for ten months to create a public safety blueprint which will be used by decision-makers to create programs and allocate resources for a variety of public safety efforts. The group understood that the result of this community effort would be to reduce further an already- low serious crime rate as well as to lessen negative quality-of-life behaviors, thus altering the existing perception that downtown Wheaton is unsafe.

Stakeholders also realized that Wheaton's activity level was changing quickly. With the opening of Macy's and the completion of Westfield Shoppingtown Wheaton's expansion, Wheaton will have an additional million visitors per year. By the end of 2004, the downtown will have 360 housing units added to its base. Within five years, Wheaton will have at least another ***one thousand*** residential units. It is our obligation to ensure that these new customers return and these new residents see the wisdom of their choices. As we succeed, we will create an atmosphere that encourages business retention and growth and fosters the desirability of Wheaton as a destination.

II. Public Safety Task Force Methodology

The Public Safety Task Force ("PSTF") met bimonthly as a "committee of the whole" and monitored the work of its four subcommittees which met on alternate months. These subcommittees studied:

- Appearances, Activity Levels and Public Perceptions (Group A)
- Public / Private Safety Personnel and Quality of Life Issues (Group B)

- Facilities, Design and Safe Streets (Group C)
- Prevention, Community Policing and Community Prosecution (Group D)

All of the subcommittees identified current resources and gaps. They then worked to prioritize needs based upon demographic information and projections of Wheaton in the next decade. The subcommittees reported back to the PSTF which ranked priorities in each area. A public forum was held on _____ in which Draft Recommendations were reviewed by the public and then finalized.

III. **A Snapshot of Wheaton Today: The Urban District Model, Changing Demographics and Public Safety Issues**

The Wheaton Urban District (“WUD”)* was created in 1986 by legislation. It is a County-government version of a BID (Business Improvement District). Like its private counterpart, the Urban District responds to the need for enhanced services in the areas of security, cleanliness, marketing and promotions, as well as specialized streetscape and other infrastructure. Importantly, the Wheaton Urban District features an easily accessed “city hall” which provides and is accountable for those services. Wheaton Urban District staff and the eleven-member Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee advocate on behalf of the District’s interests to the County.

*The Wheaton Urban District is alternately referred to as the Central Business District (CBD) or the downtown. While there are technical differences in the terms, all describe the commercial area of Wheaton.

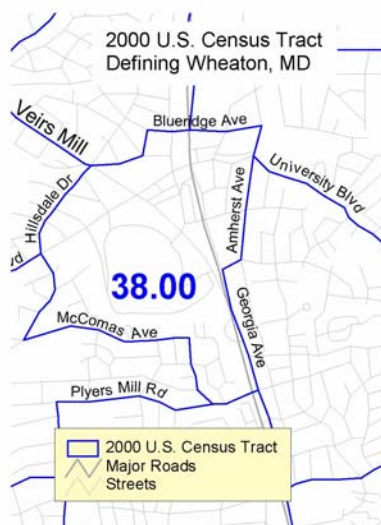
The Wheaton Urban District was established because County leaders understood that more intense activity levels in a downtown necessitated such services. They understood that, in order to be competitive in the era of shopping malls, the downtown had to provide mall-like service. Finally, they understood that an appropriate menu of services at an appropriate level would encourage downtown prosperity because customers would have a safe and pleasant experience while frequenting downtown businesses. The Urban District’s mission, put simply, is to keep downtown Wheaton ***Clean, Safe and Attractive***. The value of the Wheaton Urban District’s work as a crime preventative can be understood best by referencing “Broken Windows Theory”, which asserts that fear of crime is generally related to minor rather than major offenses. In March 1982, James Q. Wilson and George Kelling

published their groundbreaking article in The Atlantic Monthly titled “Breaking Windows.” The now famous concept held that “if a factory or office window is broken, passersby observing it will conclude that no one cares or no one is in charge..... In time, a few will begin throwing rocks to break more windows.... Soon all of the windows will be broken... small disorders lead to larger and larger ones....”

The Wheaton Urban District established a network of community partners, including the Wheaton Redevelopment Steering Committee, the Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board, the Wheaton Neighborhood Network, County Police, the Wheaton Citizens Coalition, Westfield Shoppingtown Wheaton, business owners and landlords to ensure that Wheaton’s residents, business and customers perceive that they are in “friendly space.” As Jane Jacobs said in The Death and Life of Great American Cities, “The first thing to understand is that the public peace – the sidewalk and the street peace – of cities is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves” (Jacobs, 1961, 31-32). Downtown Wheaton’s services have followed Jacobs’ dictum, and have relied on the police as a partner, while establishing standards of cleanliness, destination activities, and attractive surroundings.

IV. Demographics

Wheaton is Montgomery County's "Little Adams Morgan." The appeal of its eclectic ethnic restaurants and stores is known throughout the metropolitan region. The demographic change that has brought about today's rich multicultural neighborhood can be seen by comparing key indicators of Census Tract 7038 (encompassing the Urban District and immediate surrounding neighborhoods) and Montgomery County as a whole:

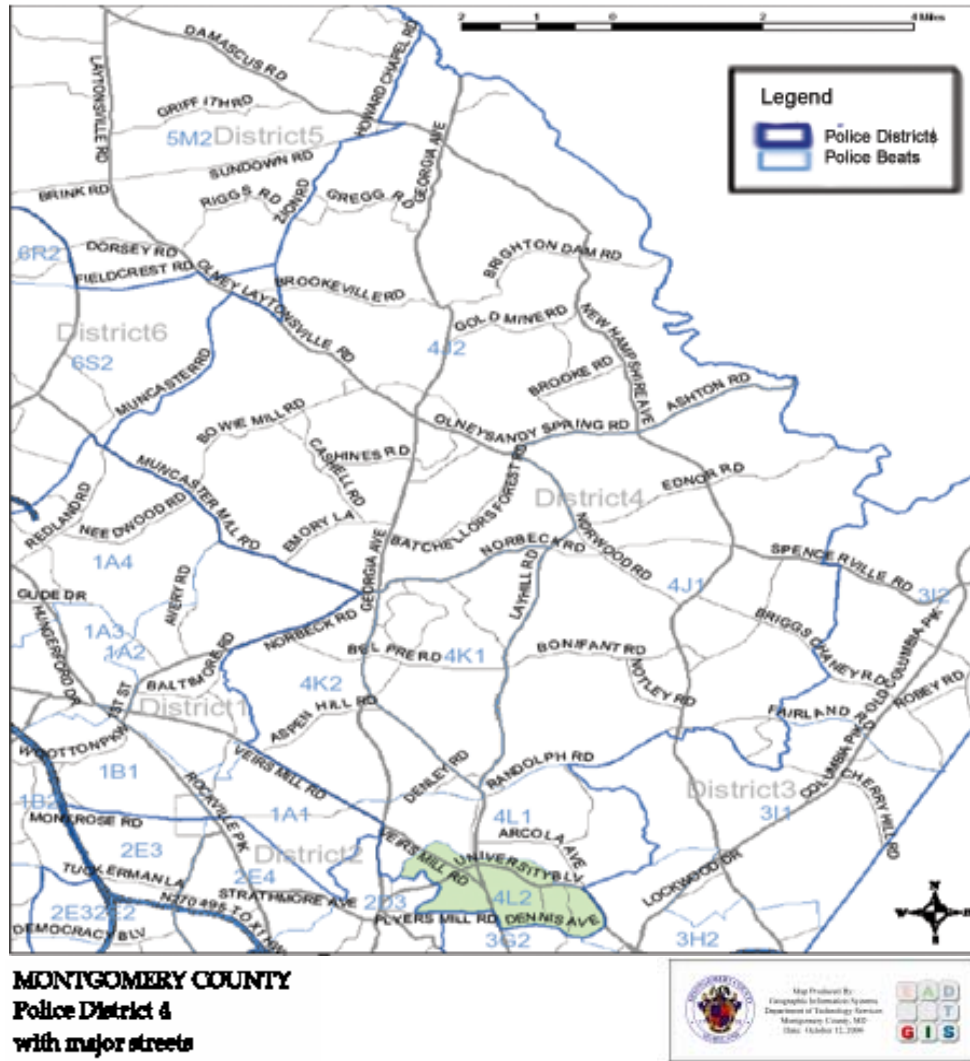


RESIDENTIAL DEMOGRAPHICS-DOWNTOWN WHEATON AND IMMEDIATE VICINITY

	Wheaton	Montgomery County
White	41.1%	68.2%
Hispanic	34.3%	11.4%
Black	17.6%	14.0%
Asian	10.8%	12.0%
Median Age	34.0 years	37.3 years
Language Other than English	58.0%	31.6%
Foreign Born	49.6%	26.7%
Median Income Family	\$55,781	\$79,115

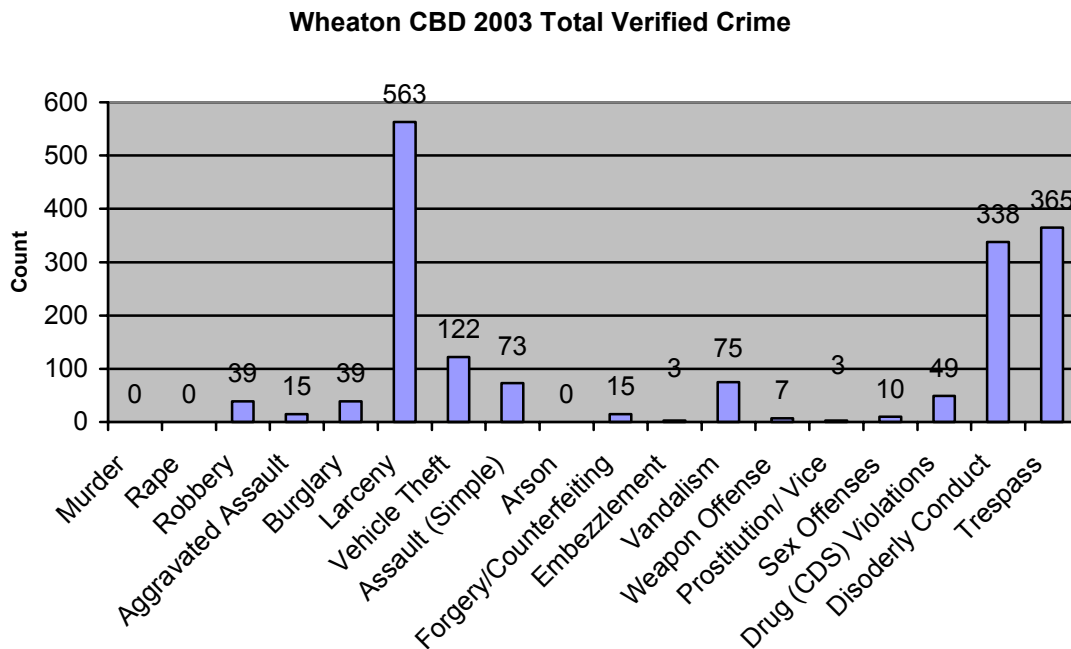
Clearly, today's downtown Wheaton's residents are somewhat younger and significantly more ethnic than Montgomery County at large. They are also less affluent.

V. Wheaton Today: Crime Statistics



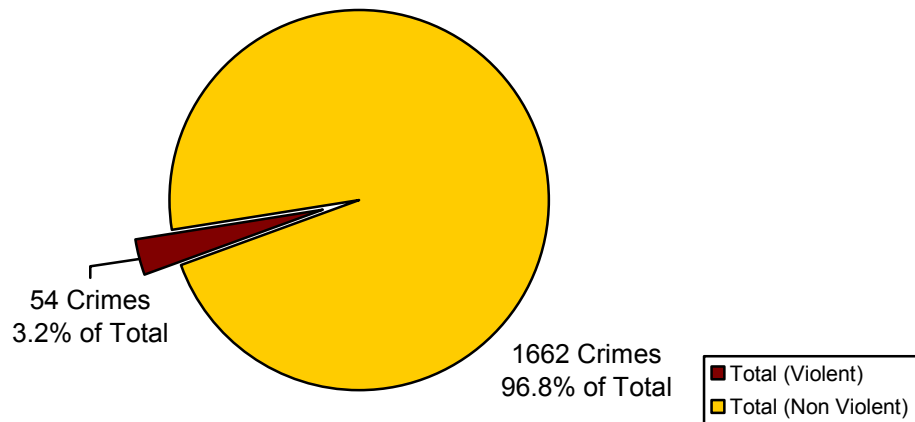
Traditional crime statistics generated by the Montgomery County Police confirm that downtown Wheaton is a safe place to live, work and do business. The Wheaton Central Business District (CBD) is in the 4th Police District. This District is 89 square miles and incorporates the area from Georgia Avenue and Dennis Avenue all the way north to the Howard County line. Unfortunately, although 86.7% of violent crime (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault) occurs outside the CBD limits, these events are often reported as occurring in the ‘Wheaton District’. This promotes the assumption that *any* crime which occurs in this very large area has occurred in *downtown* Wheaton. Thus, people perceive that downtown Wheaton is an unsafe area. This simply is not true.

VERIFIED CRIME WHEATON CBD 2003



Wheaton's crime rate, as well as its special problems and needs, can be understood by making some key comparisons between verified crimes (those that police have determined to have actually occurred) in the downtown and in Montgomery County as a whole. In 2003, Wheaton had 54 violent crimes. Violent crimes are defined as murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Wheaton had ***no murders or rapes in 2003***, but there were 39 robberies and 15 aggravated assaults. The total number of crimes in Wheaton that year was 1716. Of these, 1662 were non-violent incidents. ***Only 3.2% of Wheaton's crime last year was violent crime.***

**Verified Crime Wheaton CBD 2003
Violent vs. Non Violent Crime**



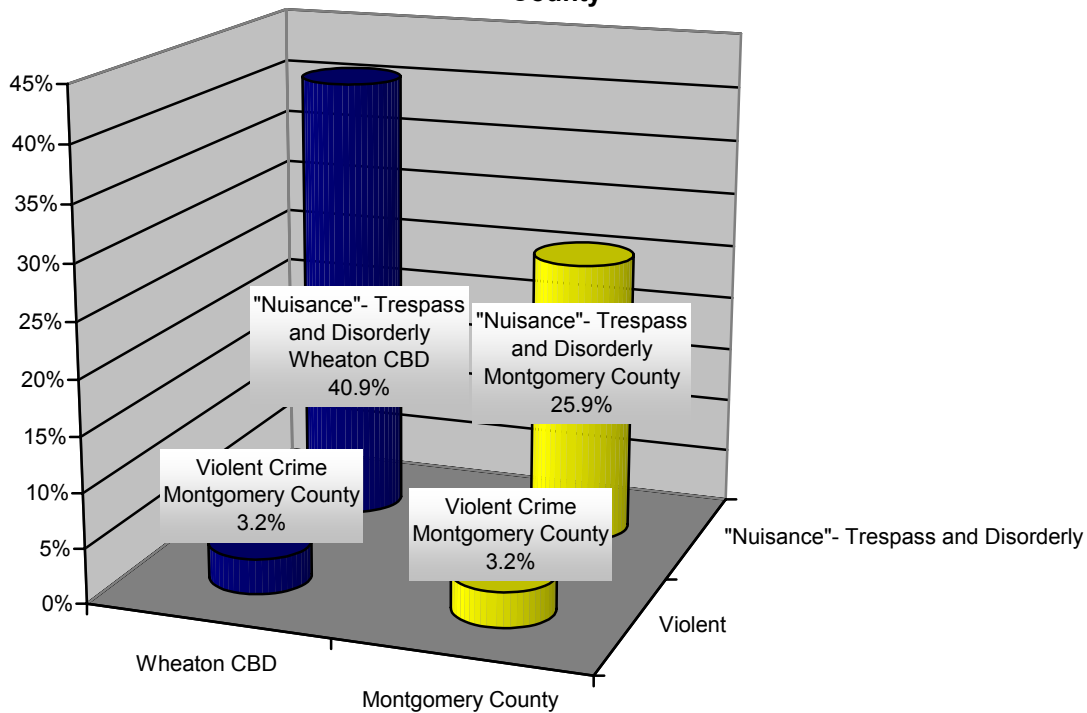
Category	Number	Percentage of Total Crime
Violent Crime (Murder, Rape, Robbery, Aggravated Assault)	54	3.2%
Non Violent Crime	1662	96.8%
(Total)	1716	

Looking at Montgomery County as a whole, in 2003 there were 2114 violent crimes out of a total of 65,067 verified crimes. ***The percentage of violent crime throughout Montgomery County is 3.2% - the same as the violent crime rate in downtown Wheaton.***

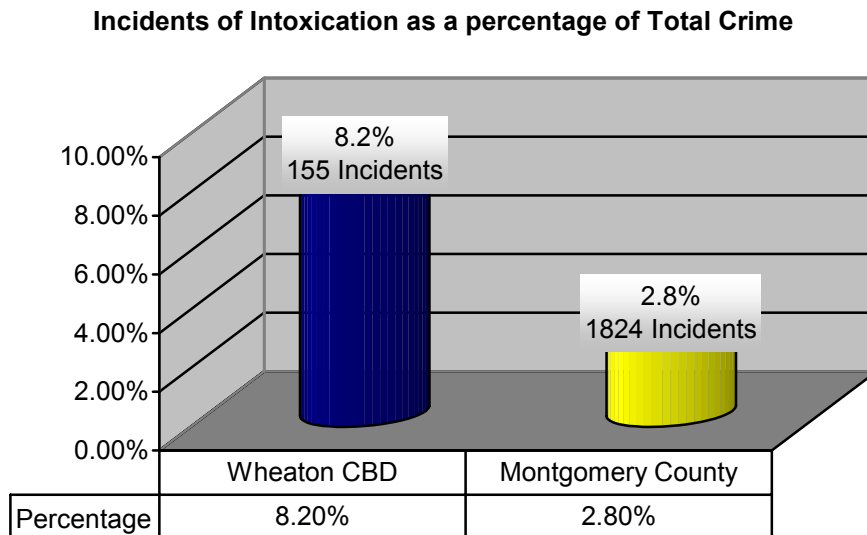
However, the downtown/County similarity breaks down dramatically when the “nuisance” crimes of disorderly conduct and trespass are compared. Generally highly visible, these crimes are very much tied to the public’s perception of an area.

In 2003, downtown Wheaton had 703 incidents of trespass and disorderly conduct, representing 40.9% of its total crime. Montgomery County as a whole had 16,860 cases, representing 25.9% of its crime. Wheaton significantly outpaces the County in these perception crimes.

Comparison of Rates of Crime Wheaton CBD and Montgomery County



Downtown Wheaton also suffers from a large number of police calls for intoxicated persons. Currently, being intoxicated is not a crime in Montgomery County, although it *is* a criminal offense to be *disorderly*. The downtown had 155 verified calls to deal with intoxicated people in 2003. If these calls were included in the crime statistics, intoxication would represent 8.2% of total crime in the downtown. In contrast, incidents of intoxication represent only 2.8% of crime in the County as a whole. Clearly, Wheaton's *rate* of drunkenness to which police respond is almost **three times** that of the County.



Again, if being intoxicated were a criminal offense in Montgomery County, nuisance type crimes (trespass, disorderly conduct and intoxication) would represent 28.7% of verified crimes in the county **but would represent a staggering 45.9% of the crime in downtown Wheaton.** Clearly, these statistics provide some clues as to why Wheaton suffers from a lingering perception that it is an unsafe area.

Negative perceptions also persist, as discussed earlier in this report, because of the “Broken Windows” associations with deteriorated private/public infrastructure. While there has been much improvement to the downtown’s public infrastructure, including decorative lighting and streetscape, still many areas need this treatment. Significant private reinvestment has begun, yet some of the downtown strip centers still have not been spruced up. Alleys remain uninviting to the public and overall lighting needs improvement.

VI. WHEATON TODAY: SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Downtown Wheaton has two special characteristics that make the traditional link between crime rates/population and public safety resources quite difficult.

- First, until the summer of 2004, Wheaton was Montgomery County’s only Urban District ***without*** any residential population

inside its boundaries. Crime rates are measured throughout the country as “number of crimes per 1,000 people.” It is easy to see, therefore, that this traditional measurement would provide a very skewed result in downtown Wheaton if solely relied on by decision-makers.

- Second, downtown Wheaton’s geography and land uses are quite different from those of the County’s other urban areas. By far the smallest downtown at only 69 acres, Wheaton is one of the very few downtown areas in the region to contain a major regional mall with close to 1,000,000 square feet of retail. As of March 2005, Westfield Shoppingtown Wheaton will double in size. The small downtown is also trisected by three State roads: Georgia Avenue, (MD 197) which the State Highway Administration considers the most heavily traveled non-limited access road in the State; Veirs Mill Road (MD 586) and University Boulevard (MD 193).

In order to gauge Wheaton’s special characteristics as more accurate indicators of public safety resource needs, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) was asked to study *activity levels* in the downtown area (August 2004). MNCPPC analysts looked at 1) the number of downtown workers in office, retail and industrial; 2) gross floor area by type of land use; 3) trips generated by these uses; 4) vehicle occupancy factors; 5) traffic volumes by time of day. Vehicle trips were adjusted to reflect incoming trips only, thus preventing double-counting. **Analysis shows that on any given day between 6:00 a.m. and midnight almost 72,000* persons visit the Wheaton CBD. This number *does not include* the people who walk to Metro and the high volume of ‘pass through’ trips on Georgia Avenue (MD 97).**

Estimate of Visitors to Wheaton Central Business District by time of day

Time Period	Vehicle Visits	Occupancy Factor	Population
6-9	6,163	1.4	8,628
9-12	8,419	1.4	11,787
12 –3	9,650	1.4	13,510
3 – 6	6,337	2.2	13,941
6 – 9	5,411	2.4	12,986
9 – Midnight	2,838	2.0	5,675
Total	38,817	2.0	66,526*

* includes residential population estimated at 5,100

As noted earlier in this report, Westfield estimates that Macy’s and the Shoppington’s new stores will bring in at least 1,000,000 additional customers per year. With this understanding members of the PSTF have concluded that **it is necessary to use activity level in a downtown as a key indicator of resource requirements.** Indeed, this follows the logic used by the County when the Wheaton Urban District was established in 1986: *intense activity necessitates enhanced services.*

VII. Wheaton Today: Public Safety Resources

The traditional method of establishing the “correct” number of police officers assigned to an area is to utilize a ratio based on population within that area. While the ratio varies throughout the nation, in Montgomery County it is 1.2 officers per 1,000 residents. Because downtown Wheaton has only just begun to have a residential population within its boundaries, the traditional resource allocation method has not served the downtown’s needs. Even with the residential base now increasing dramatically, current resource levels must be considered in terms of activity levels.

The chart below describes the current numbers of sworn officers and contract security personnel in downtown Wheaton:

Public Safety Staff Resources in Downtown Wheaton

Organization	Current Staffing	Proposed Increase	Total
Montgomery County Police 4th District	*15	14 CBD-dedicated officers	29
Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Police/Parking Lot District Detail	0.7	0.9	1.6
MVM Security (contract security for County parking lots and garages)	3	2	5
WMATA- Metro Police	1	2	3
Wheaton Urban District Safe Team	13	12	25
Westfield Shoppingtown Wheaton	27	10	37

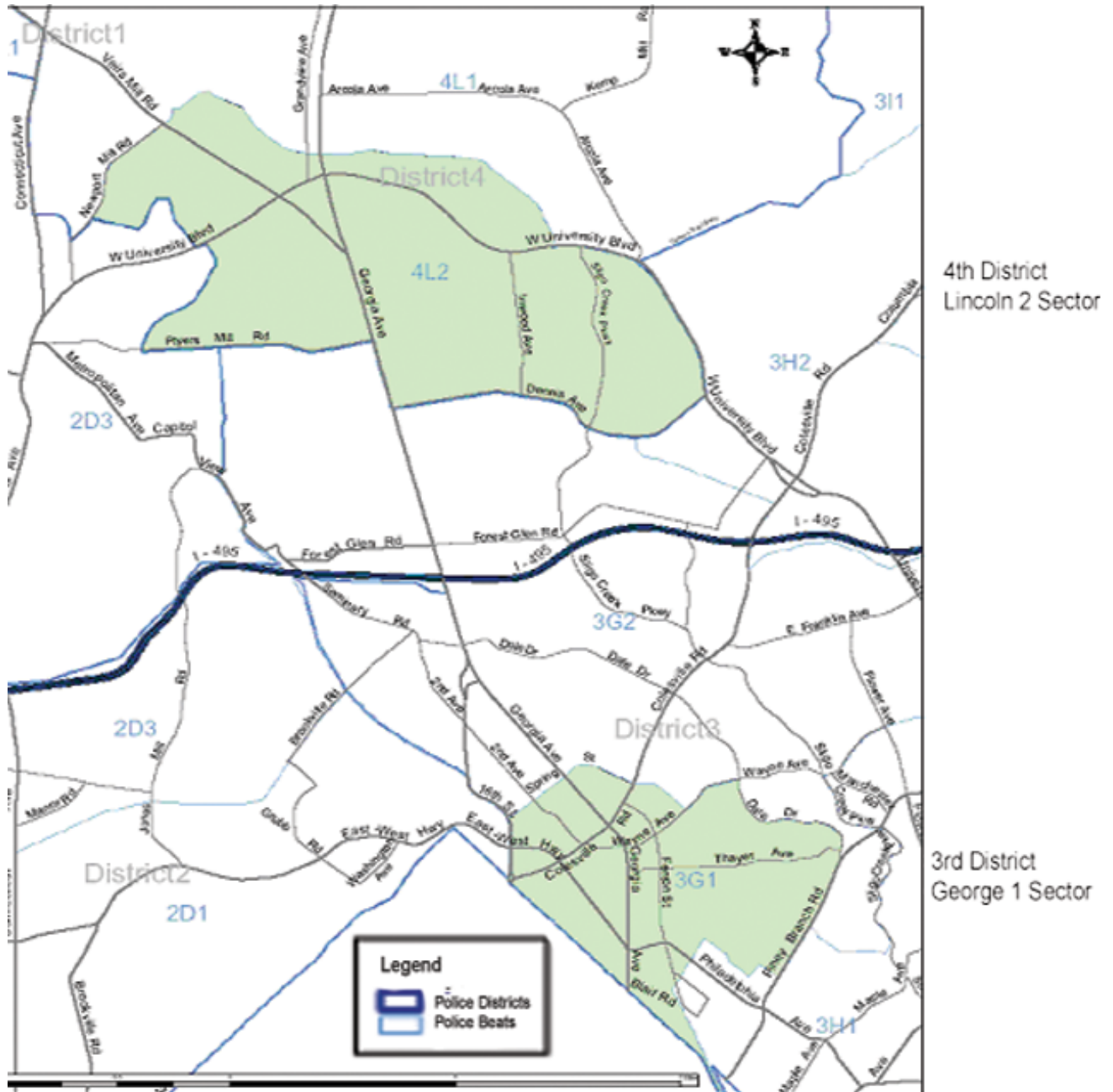
*total assigned to Lincoln Sector Beat 2 of which CBD is a part

On August 1, 2004 the 4th Police District underwent a redeployment of its personnel. This effort provides for additional supervision and patrol officers but not a dedicated CBD team. Typically, a dedicated team does not respond to calls as a primary unit but focuses more of its time on community policing, prevention and enforcement.

Members of the PSTF have been impressed by the positive changes in the look and perception of downtown Silver Spring. Some of the success of the Silver Spring effort can, in part, be attributed to a significant gain in its public safety resources.

Attempts to compare staffing levels within the relevant patrol areas or “beats” in the Silver Spring CBD and the Wheaton CBD are difficult

because of differences in size and also because Silver Spring has a dedicated CBD team, while the Wheaton CBD is staffed by officers from the “Lincoln2” sector, of which the CBD is only a part (approximately one-third).



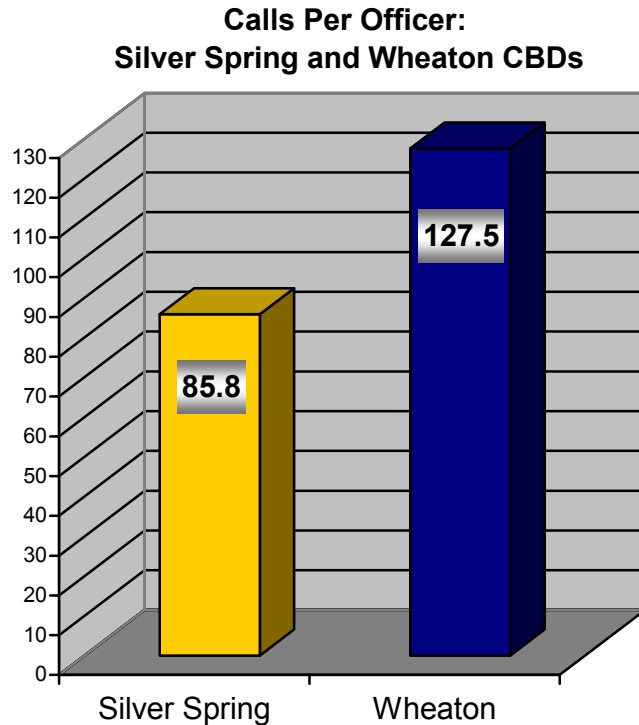
MONTGOMERY COUNTY
Police Beats 3G1 (Silver Spring) and 4L2 (Wheaton)
with major streets



What can be compared effectively is crime rates and calls for service. In 2003, the patrol officers in the Silver Spring CBD handled 3,089 calls for serious (Part I) crimes and nuisance type incidents combined. Wheaton handled 1,912 calls for Part I crime and nuisance incidents in its CBD. Put another way, Silver Spring handled 1.6 times more calls than Wheaton, which is quite understandable because of its larger size. However, its current staffing is 2.4 times greater than Wheaton's. In order to provide equitable staffing based on *current* calls for service for these two areas, Wheaton's complement of 15 officers would need to be increased by 7 officers. When the expanded Westfield Shoppingtown Wheaton opens in March 2005 and all of the current residential development is occupied, the downtown activity level will increase significantly, resulting in the need for an additional 7 dedicated officers **for a total of 14 additional CBD officers.**

COMPARISON OF SILVER SPRING/WHEATON CBD CALLS FOR SERVICE AND STAFFING (2003)

	Calls for Service	Number of Officers	Calls Per Officer
Silver Spring	3089	36	85.8
Wheaton	1912	15	127.5



VIII. Recommendations

The PSTF subcommittees each presented a series of recommendations to the Task Force. The full Task Force then utilized a process to rank the recommendations. All of the recommendations are necessary for a permanent positive change in the downtown; however **the PSTF named a top priority in each area that is indicated in bold.**

APPEARANCES, ACTIVITY LEVELS AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

The recommendations of the subcommittee were influenced by “Broken Windows” and also by another relevant urban concept, “Eyes on the Street” (Rosenbaum, 1988) which states that “a constant succession of eyes” results in safer streets. The WUD has already created a strong program of special events and a new marketing program to encourage people to visit the downtown. PSTF therefore focused on goals designed to take advantage of and increase the downtown’s activity level and enhance certain aspects of its physical design. The Task Force’s top recommendations include:

- **Strongly encourage Metro system to provide adequate cleanliness of stairwells, garage and pedestrian bridge and to heighten security presence in and around Metro station and parking areas**
- Provide more pedestrian friendly environment by utilizing landscaping, way finding signage, outdoor seating and reshaping building placement in downtown Wheaton
- Increase marketing and promotion of downtown Wheaton via businesses and community partnerships, advertising, and media outreach
- Utilize innovative county incentives to encourage existing businesses to reinvest and expand, while recruiting for new businesses to locate in downtown Wheaton

PUBLIC/PRIVATE SAFETY PERSONNEL AND QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES

“Routine Activities” theory, another key urban concept, supports the need for enhanced security which utilizes technological innovations in downtown areas. It tells us that criminals seek targets where there is an absence of guardians. Guardians can be police, ‘Safe Team’ patrols or contract security. (Cohen and Felsen, 1979). “Rational Choice” theory (Akers, 1997) further points out that offenders choose to commit crimes after assessing the presence of guardians and the vulnerability of crime targets.

The subcommittee studied these ideas against Wheaton’s public safety personnel resources, its public safety technology and its quality of life issues. The PSTF prioritized recommendations as follows:

- **Increase the number of dedicated (CBD-only) officers in downtown Wheaton to a total of 12 officers with 2 sergeants; additionally, there should be at least one sworn Hispanic liaison officer. The increase in personnel should be matched by an increase in equipment, to include five bicycles, three motorized scooters, preliminary breath testers (PBTs) and Nextel phones for all officers**
- Increase other agency public safety personnel (Park Police, MVM Security, Westfield Security)
- Designate and supply a CBD Police/Clean and Safe Office in downtown Wheaton that is accessible to the public
- Expand Clean and Safe Team coverage to seven days per week
- Install security cameras in County parking garages
- Create a civilian Hispanic Liaison Outreach Worker position
- Improve public safety communications by creating a mechanism (fax machine, Web Board etc) to report activities between the different public safety agencies in a timely manner

FACILITIES, DESIGN AND SAFE STREETS

As discussed earlier, downtown and Business Improvement District (BID) managers are highly aware that criminal offenders are drawn to areas which have significant signs of neglect such as litter, unpleasant odors and graffiti. (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). The subcommittee tackled issues involving Facilities and Design and Safe Streets. The PSTF prioritized their recommendations:

- **Significantly improve downtown Wheaton's lighting in the right-of-way, including parking lots and alleys, and incentivize property owners to leave on their outdoor lights after closing**
- Create a Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) program. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is defined as the proper design and/or use of the built environment which results in reducing crime and the fear of crime. This would include a policy requiring CPTED standards to be evaluated during plan review. It would also prepare awareness materials.
- Implement pedestrian changes* recommended by various recent studies; continue coordination with Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) and Maryland State Highway Administration (MSHA). These include:
 - ✓ A median barrier in Veirs Mill Road to prevent pedestrian jaywalking
 - ✓ Construction of a new street extending Price Avenue through to Veirs Mill Road
 - ✓ Creating a four-way intersection at the junction of Veirs Mill Road and Georgia Avenue.
- Enforce the County's snow removal laws in the downtown area

**Wheaton Urban Pedestrian Safety Study, Maryland Department of Transportation, 2004*

PREVENTION, COMMUNITY POLICING AND COMMUNITY PROSECUTION

Community policing is centered on a philosophy that the primary mission of a local Police department is crime prevention, not merely responding to calls. (Downtown Safety: Addressing the Myths and the Realities, Hyett Palma Inc., 1994). Community Policing and Prosecution join the Police Department, residents and businesses in identifying and resolving community issues. **In addition to joining in endorsing pedestrian safety improvements**, subcommittee members strongly recommended

- **legislation prohibiting public urination**
- Bilingual training for all public safety personnel in downtown

IX Summary and Conclusions

Downtown Wheaton today is a vibrant and increasingly active urban area with a very low rate of serious crime. Public and private reinvestments are in the process of making it an even better location in which to live, work and do business. Yet, quality-of-life issues have combined with an aging public and private infrastructure to allow the perception to continue that downtown is unsafe. Members of the PSTF believe that this can be turned around. Among other recommendations, the Task Force requests that the County invest in Wheaton by hiring additional sworn officers whose sole assignment is in the Wheaton Urban District. When the additional public safety presence is coupled with investment in lighting, other capital improvements, and the additional activity level that redevelopment is already bringing to the downtown, the result will be a downtown that feels cleaner and safer.

The County should also work with WMATA to increase sworn personnel at the Wheaton Metro Station, which is a high complaint area. The PSTF recognizes that the County may have to offer some funding

incentives to WMATA to increase officers assigned to the Montgomery County portion of the System.

Finally, the Public Safety Task Force hopes to work with the County on legislative and human service approaches to curbing public urination and disorderly conduct in downtown Wheaton, as well as with the MNCPPC to provide for enhanced crime prevention standards for new downtown construction.

We have appreciated the opportunity to work on this essential project. Wheaton's future is bright!

Acknowledgement/Participants

Captain Jake Bise, Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Police
Peter Buitrago, Member, Wheaton Redevelopment Steering Committee
Joe Callaway, Operations Manager, Wheaton Urban District
Natalie Cantor, Director, Mid-County Regional Services Center
Jose Carrero, Wheaton resident
Joseph Davis, Director, Wheaton Redevelopment Program
Brian Donohue, Assistant General Manager, Westfield Shoppingtown
Shawn Doody, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Police
Gayle Driver, Assistant States Attorney, Montgomery County States Attorney's Office
Robert Fischer, Business Development Specialist, Department of Housing and Community Affairs
David Fraser-Hidalgo, Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee
Chuck Fromm, Vice-President, Kensington Heights Citizens Association
Marian Fryer, President, Wheaton Citizens Coalition
Nancy Gasko, Manager Business/Intergovernmental Programs, Wheaton Redevelopment
Lori Gillen, Special Projects Coordinator, Office of the County Executive
Lt. Dave Gillespie, Montgomery County Police
Robert Goldman, Executive Director, Montgomery Housing Partnership
Captain Timothy Gronau, District 1 Commander, WMATA Police
Stan Gray, Department of Public Works and Transportation
Kathleen Guinan, Executive Director, Wheaton Neighborhood Network
Lt. Ronald Hardy, Montgomery County Police
Artie Harris, Vice President, Bozzuto Development Company
Chuck Joseph, Former Executive Director, Wheaton/Kensington Chamber of Commerce
Jeff Kaufman, Bozzuto Development Company
Sherry Kinikin, Legislative Analyst, Office of Councilmember Marilyn Praisner
Lt. Demetri Kornegay, Montgomery County Police

*Sharon Lasswell, Manager Economic Development/Relocation Program, Wheaton
Redevelopment*

Filippo Leo, Chair, Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee

John Mahoney, Member, Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board

Leslie Maxam, Marketing and Special Events Manager, Wheaton Urban District

Carol McKenzie, Assistant Director, Mid-County Services Center

Assistant Chief William O'Toole, Police Department

David Morgan, Security Director, Westfield Shoppingtown

Ronald Smith, Chief of Security, Department of Public Works and Transportation

Captain Patty Walker, Police Department

Janet Yu, Business Owner, Hollywood East Café

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and analysis of current activity levels in downtown Wheaton.***

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